'disappears', it is shown (literally 'exposed'—against the permanence of the material which is 'imposed') and it owes its existence to the request made by the public at a given time, as opposed to the unilateral decision of political or economic nature.

In the case of New York, the reflection on the reality of the city and on that of rememorance through media images is taken to a different level of interference between media and memory. New York is the city most familiar to the artist, who has been residing here since 1971. The most European of American cities, New York is the 'city museum' par excellence. The New York version of City-Museum? represents a certain degree of closure for this multi-year project which has extended over several years, as well as a reflection on a medium which feeds both memory and visions of the future.

The 'myth' of New York has been founded first on the cinematic medium and subsequently by the televised image. Thanks to the power of the American visual industries (related to advertising, TV news, architecture, music, cinema...) this image of the city has become popularized throughout the West in a unique way.

New York also functions as a testing site where the impact of city/media is most emblematic. One might imagine that the city does not inspire the image transmitted of it, but the contrary is also true. The abundance and the intensity of the media's use of the city can result in an extremely rich and complex virtual environment. At the same time, this reproduction of the city has an undeniable touristic correlation to the endorsement of the entertainment industry as few other cities in the world do.

As for its iconographic content, City-Museum? provides a structure of superimposed, transparent layers. In the previous cases (whose subject matter was European cities or European-inspired cities), Muntadas constructed a visual tour through the images taken by the artist of individuals photographing each other with a monumental, urban or (neo)picturesque backdrop. These layers of mediation will be multiplied or divided in the case of New York.

The current view of City Museum? focuses on the use of the city and its landscape as scenery or backdrop (both natural and artificial) for film and television productions. Thus it presents a series of images which document the process of filming in the street, and in which a progression of interventions is given: spectator (of the work) – artist – movie cameras – scenery and actors – city. We can also add here the future spectators/consumers around the world who will receive different versions of the completed product.

Since the beginning of the 1970's, Muntadas has spoken of television as being a true window open on the world. City-Museum? represents an evolution in the concept of 'media landscape' to 'mediation of landscape,' and this intervention represents a true qualitative leap in the functioning of a new type of consciousness. It is not only technology (in fabrication, alteration, storage or reproduction of images) which contributes in this leap. We should also consider the modifications in human behavior on a large scale (trends, taste, ...) in Western societies where landscape can be consumed as one consumes an audiovisual product which uses landscape as a plot element.

City-Museum? has a precedent which, in my opinion, is of key interest: The Limousine Project[16]. This 'installation-on-wheels' consisted of a limousine (a vehicle inseparably associated with the streets of New York, whose interior is shielded by darkened windows that obstruct pedestrian's view of its interior) which traveled at specific hours of the night to certain districts of New York; districts whose primordial function already has a historic tradition: entertainment, finance, politics, ... like a 'nomadic installation' which transformed streets and movement into a locus of appearances and disappearances. The vehicle's windows had been transformed into screens projecting words and concepts which evoked the relationship between the physical and abstract symbols employed. The act of converting the smoked glass (anonymity, protection) into a screen (exhibition) also serves as an act related to 'obscenity'—wherein what is usually shielded from the citizens' view is made visible.

It is indeed the notion of citizen, of urban inhabitant, and the city's existence within an environment of constant redefinition, which Muntadas seeks to explore. The disappearance or absorption of the city into the media industries transforms its inhabitants into pure consumers.

by Bartomeu Mari, August 1995.

translation by David Auerbach

[1] Words, The Press Conference Room represents the type of conference room which customarily generates "press releases." The installation displays the media role par excellence of such architecture and design, the content of discourse (political, corporate, religious,...) and its single-minded direction, the loss of meaning of words at the moment of their media incorporation. Muntadas uses elements such as furniture, lighting and sound. The installation was presented at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (1991) and at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (1992).

[2] The Installation The Board Room was created at the Massachusetts College of Art (Boston) in 1987. The work was later presented at La Criée, Centre d'Art Contemporain in Rennes, at the exhibition "Video Skulptur" in Cologne and Berlin, at "Muntadas Instal.lacions, Passatges, Intervencions" (La Virreina, Barcelona, 1989), at the Moos Gallery in New York, the Power Plant in Toronto,the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 1990 and the National Gallery in Ottawa (Canada).

[3] See: Dissensi (tra film, video e televisione), Taormina Arte. Sellerio Editore, Palermo 1991, p. 118.

[4] The presentation of Stadium varies according to location. The work was created in 1987 at the Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff, Canada); Stadium II was presented at the Corner House (Manchester in 1989); Stadium III at the Ikon Gallery (Birmingham); Stadium IV, at the Charles H. Scott Gallery (Vancouver), Stadium V, at the Kent Fine Arts Gallery in New York in 1990; Stadium VI, at the Contemporary Art Center (New Orleans), Stadium VII at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (California in 1991); Stadium VIII, at the IVAM-Centre del Carme (Valencia), 1992 and Stadium IX at Kunstwerke (Berlin) in 1993.

[5] Muntadas: "Notes on Stadium" (1990)

[6] The installation Home, Where is Home? was presented at the exhibition "A new Necessity," in Newcastle (England) in 1990.

[7] Within the framework of "Taormina Arte 1991," Muntadas realized a work entitled Doppio Senso: spettatore osservato o speculazione voyeuristica, which displays the metamorphosis of the role of visitor/spectator within the daily life of a tourist city. In this work, the public can observe video-taped images through a peep-hole drilled in the wall of a beach house which include vignettes on such concepts as "souvenir," "tourism," "photography," "voyeurism," "stereotype," etc.

[8] See Sorkin, M. editor: Variations on a Theme Park. The New American City and the End of Public Space. Hill and Wang, New York, 1992.

[9] Muntadas: Dissensi (tra film, video, television) Op. Cit., p. 118.

[10] De Lege Ruimte Gallery, Bruges, March 1991.

[11] The creation of flower carpets in the main squares of Flemish cities is an ancient tradition celebrated at the beginning of summer. The carpets represent heraldic motifs which are tied to the cities' history.

[12] See A. Fermigier: La Bataille de Paris. Des Halles à la Pyramide. Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

[13] Muntadas: Le temps du dialogue. Interview completed by Sylvie Amar. Art Press. Paris, February 1995.

[14] See Muntadas. City Museum. Les Cahiers des Regards, Herblay, 1994.

[15] Presented at the Ateliers d'artistes de la Ville de Marseille, September 11 - October 17, 1992. The exhibition also included works by Dennis Adams, Rainer Ollendorf and Krzysztof Wodiczko.

[16] Part of the exhibition "Rhetorical Image" at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

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- Ville Musee- Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, September 1991, Paris.
- Ciutat Museu - Carrer del Angels 16, Barcelona, June 1992.
- Ville Musee?- Atelier d'Artistes de le Ville de Marseille, September 1992.
- Cidade Museu- Forum das Artes, Brasilia, September 1993.
- Muntadas: City Museu, Sites 25, New York, June 1994.

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"The File Room," Chicago Cultural Center, 1994

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new york: city museum?

M U N T A D A S

City Museum is an on-going project which began at the Brugge Museumstad in Belgium (1990), at Ville Musée in Paris (1991), Ciutat Museu in Barcelona (1992) and Ciutat Museu in Brasilia (1994). The work views the collective space of the city as part of "the society of spectacle" with its dominant twin-industries of tourism and culture. New York: City Museum? is based on how the city is configured and perceived through media.

Concurrent exhibition by Muntadas, Portraits, is at Kent Gallery (67 Prince Street, New York) September 15—October 28.

Publications on City Museum projects are areavailable.

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2 "Stadium VIII," installation, Centre del Carme, IVAM, Valencia, 1992
3 "The Limousine Project," public intervention, New York City, 1991
4 "Words, The Press Conference Room," installation, Sydney, 1991
5 "On Translation," (the pavillion) Helsinki, 1995
6 "The Board Room," installation, 1987

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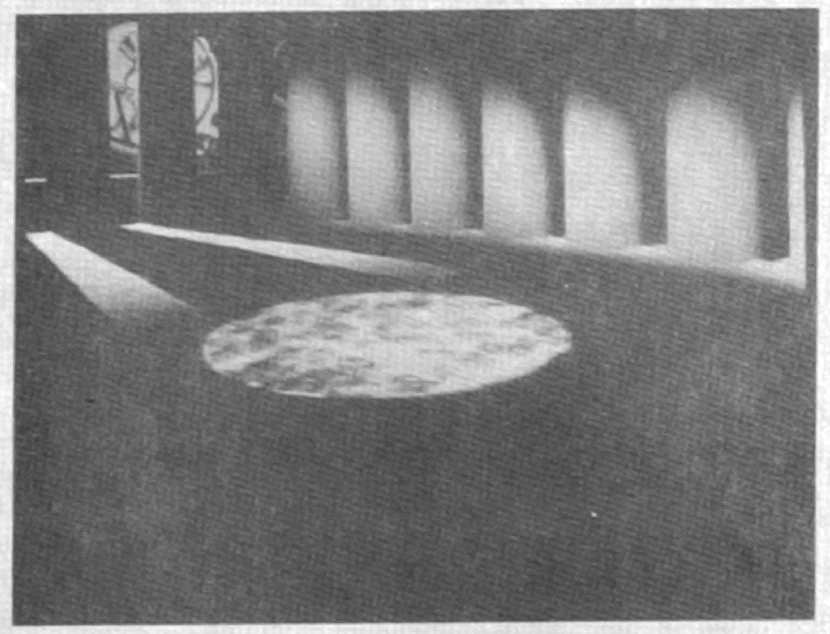

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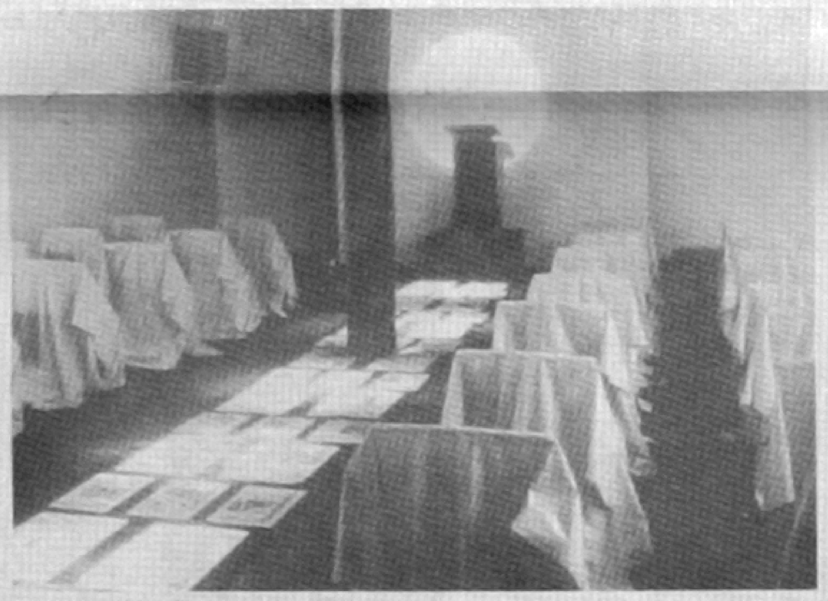

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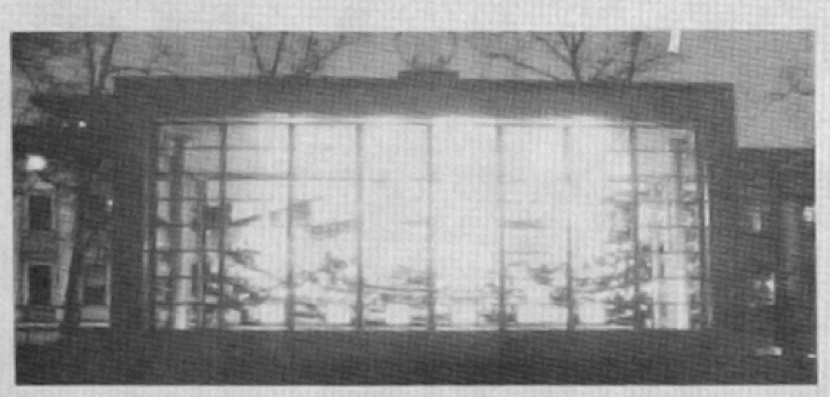

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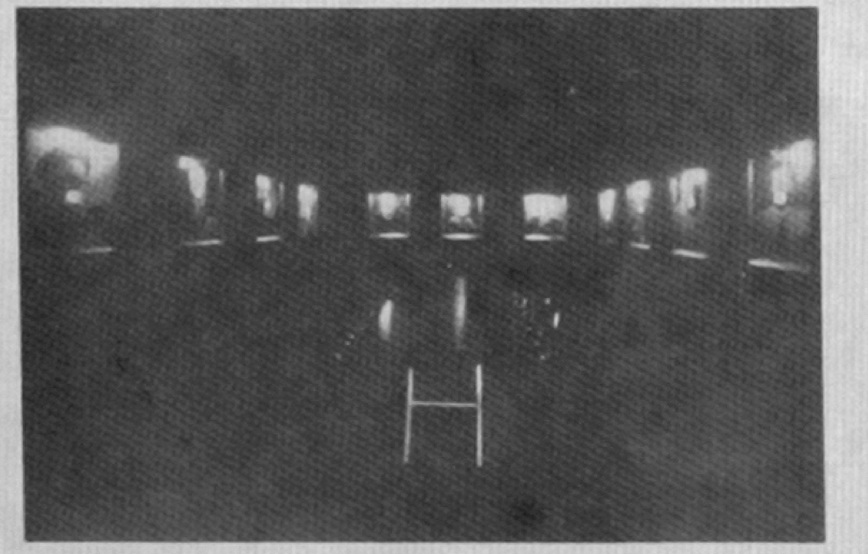


CITY MUSEUM

Over the past five years, Muntadas has produced a series of works whose common theme is the method by which they are motivated: the analysis of space, of its representation and its contingencies, of architecture and the realities of the city. Urban space has been, since the beginning of the artist's career, one of the main points of attention in his development, one of his protagonists. To define this "space" and to incorporate the specific modes in which the artist makes use of space ultimately enables us to explore one of his most emblematic and radical projects: City Museum.

This "space" is not bound by Cartesian coordinates. It is not an abstract entity, as considered in minimalist sculpture, or in mathematics. Rather it is the sum total of different human activities occurring both within and around an ideological sphere. It is a question of spatial identity that is already constructed, charged with feeling and symbolically readable, which post-industrial society either leaves as residue, or as a celebration of itself.

It is also a sense of space, with multiple qualities where numerous activities take place, in unequal proportion and perpetual variation. From the collision that occurs between these topographies and our mass media/communication industries, a new archetype of contemporary culture is born. These archetypes fill and become the "spaces" of Muntadas' critiques, as their repetition manifests a standard model, or a paradigmatic reality whose function has been proven numerous times, regardless of geographic location.

In City Museum, Muntadas refers to a particular aspect occurring within urban space: the use of time and its remains, the storage of collective memory and the changes in symbolic function that occur within the context of a contemporary industry based on the (im)balance between labor and leisure: tourism.

To approach this series of projects by Muntadas—and the relationships established between them—we should resort to a device which differs from traditional art criticism (based on the history of aesthetic ideas). In essence, the pointed critique of Muntadas' work corresponds to the cinematographic technique of approaching (zoom in) and distancing (zoom out), and refers to experiences on a universal scale, which also occur within a local context: from situations which are abstract (standard) to concrete (specific). These projects are open proposals which are defined by the elucidation of contradictions, by the manifestation of opposites which have been shrouded by a mass-marketed, consumerist culture, and which become enriched with each new presentation.

Taken together, the works of Muntadas may be situated at an axis between different disciplines of knowledge. They examine the inflections of space, of those places which mediate in the formation of contemporary culture, which itself is the result of a hybrid-process known within architecture, the mass media and their protagonists. Examining the subtle distances occurring between function, use and symbol, Muntadas reveals the ambiguous principles of cultural conventions, of architectonic paradigms and of the elements which combine in the formation of cultural character, as well as those of iconographic and moral values.

The work as a whole considers a series of inter-related installations and projects which focus both on a specific subject, as well as the methods employed in their execution: The Board Room; Stadium; Home, Where is Home?; Words, The Press Conference Room.[1]

The Board Room[2] reconstructs the space of a board room as can be found in any large corporate headquarters. This space transports us into an atmosphere of secret meetings between a select few—in the intimacy of a protected place—to the decision-making process and the unbalanced interdependency between what occurs within the meetings and their resulting effects, in addition to the corporate plots they are known to generate. It is a place where political action, ethical slogans and business strategy become muddled. This installation consists of a large central table surrounded by twelve chairs. This scenario, a sort of "Last Supper" for strangers, is adorned by thirteen portraits—the patron saints of the business world—who represent thirteen religious leaders (well known American televangelists, the late Ayatollah Khomeini and the Pope, among others). In their mouths are placed tiny video monitors transmitting images of the leaders in active life. The images show the dependence between their popular success and the use of intensive media apparatus (television, crowd events ...).

The Board Room functions as both metaphor and reality in the presentation and representation of power, in the moment of decision-making, of the use of the word within the institutionalized structure of a board room.[3]

Stadium (Homage to the Audience)[4] attests to the interaction between private and public in one of these archetypal, conspicuously open places. The stadium has been a place of paradox and contradiction since ancient times, a place where the realms of sports, politics and economics confront one another through competition, spectacle, emotion and violence. The stadium is the locus where a fusion of opposites occurs —spectator/spectacle, product/consumer. The installation shows the dominant role played by the elements of furnishing, security, lighting, control, advertising ... which all join to create an iconographic and functional whole. The installation also includes a sound work that emphasizes the presence and reactions of a collective/collected audience.

> "...On the one hand, the spectacle is shown as an event for the masses: the presence of a crowd in a given place at a given time for entertainment of a popular and hypothetically democratic nature. On the other hand, the spectacle is a vehicle for propaganda and the manipulation of the masses under the guise of entertainment. The stadium of the 20th century has become the backdrop for media events directed towards a double audience: the live audience and the communications media-consuming public (...) The audience is the consumer and the product at the same time..."[5]

Home: Where is Home?[6] follows this consideration on the public/private relationship through the notion of "house" and "home," and exposes the cultural significance of these words in our time. The installation reconstructs the interior of a house (construction in concrete) where the signs of "habitat" can be discerned despite the absence of furniture or decoration: the television, as opposed to the fireplace, provides a focal point for both family tension and cohesion (metaphor for the home—for warmth and comfort). By alluding to the structures of a "minimal habitat," Home: Where is Home? examines the notions of public and private and the social implications which these notions have within a society which places so much value on individualism, property, health, well-being, family, ... but which is unable to guarantee homes for all its members. A series of projections on the interior walls of this house and a tape which plays excerpts from songs referring to the theme of "home," remind us that the idea of home and habitat, as well as the related ideology, are justified by commercial, media and symbolic principles.

THE CITY AS MUSEUM, THE MONUMENT AS OBJECT

City Museum, is the generic name given to a series of works which provide a specific analysis of urban reality, from a point of view similar to the one employed in the aforementioned works: the archetypal (i.e. generic) nature of the places, their manipulation through the media and the cultural and economic complexity of the phenomena and events which occur within them.

The museum is an enclosed space, an institution shut off in a structure which harbors and protects objects whose nature requires protection—and preservation—so that they may survive through time. City Museum alludes to a paradoxical and inverted phenomenon which is reciprocal in its approach to history. This inversion of functions and their related symbolism is in response to a unique system: the paradigm of communication particular to the museum as we have inherited it from the 19th century: contemplation—which is also often assimilated by entertainment, by the interaction of media. Contemplation has also become absorbed into the dynamics of the culture industry which has converted it into voyeurism.[7] At a time in which museums are becoming more and more like cathedrals of entertainment, cities are yielding to the logic of the passive contemplation of objects.

During the 1980's, many European cities witnessed the proliferation of great projects in architecture and urban planning. Metropolitan scale has taken the place of urban scale and the city has been considered within a new scheme in which the dimension of the project has been subsumed by that of the "plan." Thus in the 1990's, cities have begun to suffer the consequences (explosion of conflicts linked to city's periphery, the crisis of de-urbanization of the 1970's, displacement of population from historical centers to outlying areas....) This tendency has since been continuous in the great capital cities. In France, Spain, or Germany, it has been the public sector which has initiated and maintained this sense of dynamism, linked, no doubt, to the need for the representation of power. In the United States, authors such as Michael Sorkin[8] have spoken of the substitution of public space with a sort of "permanent theme park," and the weight of great private initiative (corporations), who relentlessly bear down upon the (practically) non-existent public authority.

Beyond the activity of urban planning and the renewal of thriving leisure industries, of tourism and the consumption of images which in large part feeds a demand for new architecture, we should position ourselves in terms of our true relationship with regard to the images of the present. If a film such as Total Recall recently employed, in a rather satiric vein the possibility of "virtual vacations," "non-virtual" reality has not quite arrived at such assumptions. How can we relate to the images (as well as architectural constructs) of the past? How is the information which these images contain transformed at a time when the possibility of ever greater access to all information looms closer and closer? What perishes and what persists in memory given the prominence of information whose value is determined by that of utility? What is the contemporary logic behind the monument? Can a contemporary monument exist? In what form?

City Museum, a series of works which explore the relationship between the city and the culture industry, between tourism and spectacle, also examines the function and status of the monument in a society where information is no longer transmitted through carved stone or through the bronze of commemorative statues. What symbolism emanates from contemporary architecture? At what point does architecture itself become monumental iconography?

By establishing the relationship between objects of the past, contemporary cultural strategies can be defined by their ability to startle, attract and seduce the attention of the public (consumer).

> "...How can a relationship be formulated which includes culture, tourism and spectacle as a corollary to contemporary urbanism? In our present-day cities, exhibitions, large international conferences and festivals are activities which form part of the entertainment industry; cultural manifestations on a broad scale and within a popular idiom. How does one establish a relationship with another industry—that of tourism—with its own characteristics (social and economic)? This is a dilemma. The question is: What is the connection between culture and public? A natural/artificial system where politics and economics speculate on quantity, worth and votes..."[9]

On the other hand, the category of the monument, in its relation to the museum and to history, has experienced a considerable transformation. "Historic centers" and "monumental heritage" have achieved a new sense of dynamism through tourist consumption as products of attraction and location are continually used for entertainment.

In City Museum, Muntadas proposes a degree of confrontation in which the city is approached as paradigm—in the way that The Board Room or Stadium achieved with regard to enclosed space—and its transformation into a museum/spectacle/permanent festival. What also becomes evident is the tremendous administrative and financial apparatus associated with the activities of preservation, protection and appraisal. These strategies, universalized by macro-institutions such as UNESCO, and particularized by local administrations and agencies (especially in Europe), establish the link between a desire for historic preservation and specific programs for economic rehabilitation. The functional conversions or changes in urban areas can apparently only be accompanied by projects of intense real estate investment shielded by the expectation of profit. City Museum has been developed in specific forms in various European and American sites: Bruges, Paris, Barcelona and Brasilia, and two other sites where the City Museum statement was refigured into a rhetorical question (Marseille: Ville Musee? and New York: City Museum?).

Museumstad[10] was articulated around two principal elements: on the one hand, the city of Bruges (known on the tourist circuits as the Venice of the North), whose historic center drives an expanding tourist industry; on the other hand, the act of rejection which the inhabitants of this city's section must confront with the annual mass invasion that floods streets heaving with picturesque buildings. In the gallery, Muntadas installed two works whose objective was to emphasize the contradiction experienced by the city: the tension between the economic dynamism brought about by tourism and the urban transformations which have resulted. The gallery walls were equipped with peepholes and visors in the form of an extended and open "peep-show" through which one could view images taken on the streets of Bruges—scenes which were relatively banal: tourists visiting the city's monuments, taking countless photographs, etc. The city, its buildings and streets, are now reduced to nothing more than a backdrop for the collecting of souvenirs, its sole reason for being to provide images at a given moment.

On the gallery floor was a model for a carpet of flowers, which was later reproduced on a large scale as a poster and that appeared in many of the city's windows. It read "S.O.S. for a Bruges we can live in."[11]

The poster's distribution was tied together the townspeople's protestestation with touristic celebration in an emblematic and ironic way. The work was thus able to produce its own extreme consequences by verifying one of Muntadas' key points: the role of the artist as catalyst or conduit of information between different levels of presentation.

Ville Musée, the installation presented at Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie in Paris focused on the nature of metamorphosis in architecture as scenic backdrop in a world capital which had clearly joined the ranks of the "monumental" in its constructions: the creation and completion of spaces articulated through a multilineal axis encompassing the work, the architect, the user and the "spectator." Ville Musée reflected on the activities of urban "revitalization" through financial and cultural centers and shopping malls. The intense municipal and cultural discussions toward the end of the late 1960's concerning works undertaken in the Marais district (where the gallery is located) stoked the fires in intellectual and social circles, resulting in an economic and political schisms.[12] The effects of population displacement and sudden changes to the function of space also reveals a complex framework of interests and transactions which disregard the real meanings of work created by the urban architects or that of the artist. It is not merely a matter of tourism but a higher level of the industry for producing images—of their consumption and signification. If anything has contributed to the evolution of architectural criticism, Muntadas suggests, it is the intervention of communications media on various levels, from the macro-reality of industrialized media to the micro-reality of the individual who accepts and consumes these codes and forms.

Our consideration of the new monumentalism being practiced in cities such as Paris, with the axis formed by the binomials of city/museum, contemplation/voyeurism, architecture/spectacle, leads us from the Parc de la Villette to the Pyramid at the Louvre, passing by the Pompidou Center, the Arch de la Défense, the Tres Grand Bibliothèque—so many signs which must appeal to a media reason for being, to a media reason for representing, beyond actual function. These excursions provoke a relationship between "new" and "old" which invites comparisons and a reappraisal of the picturesque— specifically that of the spectacular.

A similar approach was taken in the presentation of the work Ciutat-Museu in Barcelona, a city which, since the 1980's, has witnessed changes in its own physiognomy through the remodeling of many of its districts, especially with regard to public spaces. Architects and artists were called upon to participate in prestigious, ongoing campaigns which covered the length and breadth of the city.

In this sense, Muntadas recently offered a succinct analysis of the role which the artist occupies—the "need for a redefinition of (artistic) intention in urban space." As the artist himself states:

> "...I prefer to address the question of the temporal in opposition to the permanent (...) In an ideal situation, the work extends over a period of time and begins to form a part of the collective memory. (The work) is not erected with the idea of permanence, but rather it becomes permanent through this process which is an integral part of it. The artist community has the chance to "understand" it..."[13]

Regarding the city of Barcelona, the hyperactivity of the public sector was to incite the private sector and reconstruct a "new urban" governing principle which had been determined by opposition to the orthodox modernism of the 1970's. The great sports media and economic event implied in the 1992 Olympics placed the "golden clasp" on the avalanche of institutional investments marked for the transformation of the city. Out of this fever rose a great number of buildings and urban complexes, perceived from the outset as a true spectacle of contemporary architecture. This rapid development in construction produces, at the very least, an "inflation" in scenery and points of attraction.

These different presentations of the work have included specific visual apparatus which merits discussion. By inducing the spectator to "look through the peep hole" in the gallery , the artist is proposing a redefinition of the acts and gestures identified with obscenity which we traditionally associate with the sexual and the perverse. Etymologically, however, "obscenity" is a term which derives from stagecraft, theater and fiction: what is not within the scene is not shown, and therefore we are not meant to know about it. By transferring the traditional visual apparatus of the "peep-show" to the image of the city, Muntadas connects the interior of the gallery as a space protected from the public exterior, in an inverted relationship of terms. What is found in the interior has been transformed into the obscene, and the obscene always draws back to the repressed or the morally censurable. The images placed on the "other side" also show persons and situations of "voyeurism exposed." These images have been published in an edition (see note 14) which synthesizes the iconographic spirit of the work and by drawing together historical, found, symbolic and extemporaneous images by the artist in cities where the project has taken place. The images offer a variety of instances of spectacle-as-"voyeurism," and have a consistent individual impact, which is comparable to what the public experiences at the installation.

Cidade Museu was realized within the context of the "Forum of the Arts" (Brasilia, 1994). In fact, Brasilia is already part of the architectural and urban culture of our century being one of the most effective attempts to combine elements of utopia (political and architectural) with reality. Brasilia, devised during the 1950's by urban planner Lucio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer, under the aegis of President Juscelino Kubitschek , was inaugurated in 1960. It exemplifies the union of the political with the architectural project, or the need that all political projects have to be translated into buildings or monuments. Brasilia is in itself a monument to Western rationality, a faithful rendering of modern postulates in urban planning, according to the ideas expressed by the Bauhaus and the Charter of Athens (Le Corbusier, 1933). Rising from a plain cleared from the jungle, Brasilia thus contains, beyond its dreamlike aspects, a strong component of mysticism and "new society" idealism. The avant garde nature of the architecture is in response to an avant garde (i.e. "total") project of society in which physical order responds to moral order—which was still possible in the Brazil of the 1950's.

If the 20th century has seen more or less fortunate examples on either a large or small scale of the bond between political leadership and urban planning, the spatial and temporal unity of Brasilia is certainly paradigmatic. It is the absence of the past, the simultaneity of public and private space, the autonomy required by each building while still constituting a city. Brasilia is the crystallization of the platonic ideal city of the 20th century prior to the oil and nuclear crisis—an utterly self-involved fabrication.

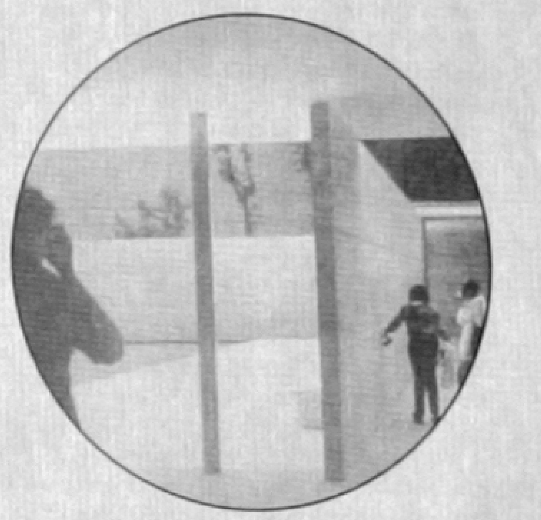
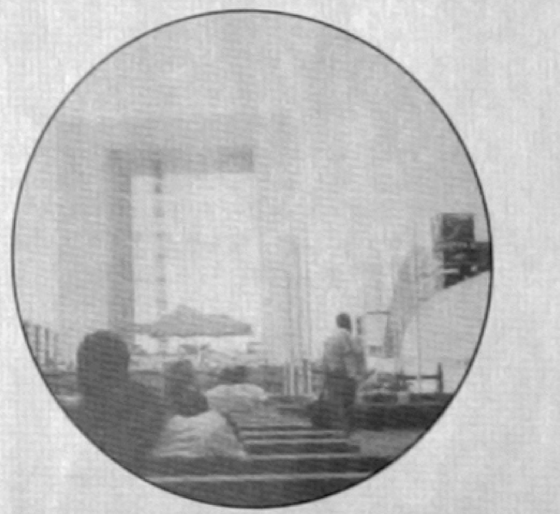
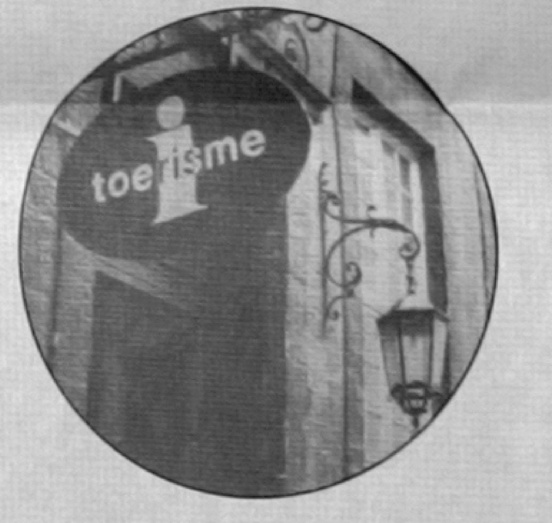
CITY – MEMORY – REMEMBRANCE

After the presentation of Ville Musee in Paris, Muntadas was invited by the "Ateliers d'Artistes de la Ville de Marseille" (Artists Workshops of Marseilles) by Bernard Gavoty, to show the project there. Here Muntadas re-examined the experience gained and translated it into questioning not only the conditions of Marseilles but also of the guidelines of the project itself. (It then included a question mark which opens the current investigation on the issue: Ville Musee? (15).

The presentation of this work gave rise to an invitation by Christine Breton (D.G.A.C.) for the artist to "answer" the same question he had proposed. It was to be expressed within the frame work of a public (city) commission which contained a flexibility in its definition. The logic involved in the public commission may be seen as somehow distinct from the attitude of the artist. But the reaction to the commission was also emblematic: Marseille: Mythes et Stereotypes, boasts a specific sub-title (regard des regards) and a definition— "a screen for a film and a film for a screen".

The development of City Museum is not merely an inventory of urban anecdotes for an indeterminate number of cities, but a representation of the specific effects of a collision between memory, history, spectacle, and the consumption of images within the context of the Western city. The domain of public works in France over the past ten years can be distinguished by the promotion of great projects which for the most part adopt the language of permanence and monumental presence. Marseille: Mythes et Stéréotypes has two specific aspects which are in reaction to this tradition: one concerns content, the other presentation. Muntadas proposes the making of a film (video transferred to 35mm) which contains excerpts of other films (documentary, fiction, television programs...) interviews with professionals involved in the elaboration of the image of the city (through writing, TV, cinema...) as well as literary quotations —and images of faces of people from Marseilles—where the city appears represented over the course of time."

The presentation of the work takes the form of a traveling cinema: a projector, a portable screen and the corresponding film—all contained in cases which can be easily transported by tow-truck. The work is available to anyone who wishes to view it (neighborhoods, associations, municipal groups, ...), and can be activated within a wider range of possibilities and situations.

A leaflet consisting of a poster, texts related to the commission, a description of the process and development of the work with notes from the artist, was also published and inserted in the magazine Tactik. It served as an invitation to the public, a summon to attend the screenings and to participate in the existence of the work.

The tradition of the mobile cinema in Mediterranean Europe dates from the 1930's, and has its own parallels in the activities of Soviet avant garde film-makers, as well as in the American "drive-in." Muntadas assumes a position of confrontation in response to the vocabulary of public art as it has been promoted in recent years by proposing a structure which is mobile, temporary and whose use is relatively free. In effect, Marseille, Ville-Musée? not only posits a question to the artist's entire work, but also serves as an invitation to question historical identity which finds its counterpoint in the cinematographic medium: the image of the city itself transformed through fiction or visual experience. Similarly this work is temporary: its duration is determined by the length of the film; it is mobile and can be shown in a multitude of locations; it stands in radical opposition to the more common characteristics of the monument. The work "appears" and